



Comment on objections 47

Julian Hill MP

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Victorian Redistribution comments on objections uploaded from the AEC website.

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Additional information: 5 page submission / comments on objection is attached as a .pdf document.



Julian Hill MP

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR BRUCE



18 May 2018

SUBMISSION – COMMENTS ON OBJECTIONS – Julian Hill MP

Members of the Augmented Electoral Commission

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Commission's proposed redistribution and objections that have been made in relation to the electorate of Bruce which I represent.

My comments relate predominantly to the proposed changes and relevant objections that affect the Bruce electorate and primarily its interface with the neighbouring electorates of Isaacs and Hotham, while necessarily taking account and touching on the broader context and other south eastern electorates.

I acknowledge the Commission's proposal to make Bruce a broadly East-West electorate, rather than the North-South shape it currently takes, and accept the broad intent of the Commission's logic.

There is a better, more elegant way to improve on the draft proposal and achieve the Commission's intent, without unnecessarily dividing actual community of interests which takes account of physical features such as the Dandenong / Pakenham Railway line and other long established boundaries.

The Commission's intent can be fully achieved with significantly less dramatic changes to the current electorates of Bruce, Hotham and Isaacs and disruption for electors which is outlined well in the Labor Party's objection. This would see 61.3% of current Bruce electors retained in the new Bruce electorate, as opposed to 34.5% under the Commission's initial proposal.

I do agree with the Commission that it is necessary for the revised Bruce electorate to take electors from the electorate of Holt. While understanding, however, the Commission's intent in proposing to transfer voters from Isaacs and Hotham to Bruce, I do not believe that the electors from these electorates form as much of a community of interest within Bruce as with existing electors in Mulgrave and Wheelers Hill.

The Pakenham Railway line

As the Redistribution Committee acknowledged in 1994 and again in 2010, the Pakenham Railway Line is a “solid boundary”, one of the strongest in Melbourne, and I believe that this should continue to be the boundary between Bruce and Isaacs and Hotham.

The railway line is a major divider in the Greater Dandenong community. “*Are you south or north of the line?*” is a standard question in Greater Dandenong and communities have developed autonomously on each side of the line. Residents in Dandenong North shop at the Dandenong Market or Waverley Gardens Shopping Centre, not at Parkmore Shopping Centre where residents South of the line shop. Commuters meet at the station from their respective sides of the tracks, but rarely cross them.

In this respect the Greater Dandenong community can be understood as two distinct communities, split for decades by the Pakenham Line. Moving the boundary between Bruce and Isaacs from the Pakenham Line to Cheltenham Road would wrongly suggest three Greater Dandenong communities: one North of the train line, one between the train line and Cheltenham Road, and one South of Cheltenham Road. This would not be advantageous to any of these communities and is not necessary to achieve the Commission’s intent.

I cannot see how abandoning the railway line as a longstanding boundary accords with the Commission’s statutory criteria or previous decisions.

That said, I acknowledge that there is a need to cross the railway line for mathematical reasons, however of the electorates of Bruce, Hotham and Isaacs, there need be only one that crosses the train line. I submit that it makes more sense for that electorate to be Hotham for reasons summarised below under the heading ‘Springvale and Springvale South’: essentially that Springvale and Clayton have much in common and that the Railway line has not evolved as such a major barrier / dividing line in these areas as it has in Noble Park / Dandenong / Keysborough.

Police Road boundary

The Commission’s proposed boundary between Bruce and Hotham does not define an actual community of interest and is merely an administrative boundary. As detailed in the ALP’s submission, there are strong and established links between residents, community facilities and businesses in Mulgrave and the areas north of Princes Hwy (Dandenong North and Noble Park North), which should be maintained as it is not unavoidable to make such dramatic changes at this time.

As such I propose the main roads of Springvale Road and Waverley Road be used as more logical boundaries, noting these are also largely suburb boundaries. This proposal would require far fewer electors to move between electorates, maintain Mulgrave and Wheelers

Hill in Bruce, where they have been since 1955, and provide a very strongly identifiable boundary along Springvale Road.

There is no need to make such radical changes to the seat of Bruce when gradual changes can be made that accommodates the Commission's strategic logic and maintains historical and community interests within the electorate of Bruce.

Springvale and Springvale South

Splitting the communities of Springvale and Springvale South across three electorates divides the nationally significant Indo-Chinese communities here. These suburbs have a significant history in the electorates of Hotham and, for a time, Isaacs and this should be maintained where possible. Indo-Chinese communities are the dominant population group across the suburbs of Springvale South, Springvale, Clarinda, Westall, Clayton and Clayton South, including the two major shopping and business centres of Clayton and Springvale. These centres are well connected from North to South in a way that suburbs such as Noble Park and Dandenong are not, and it makes sense for Hotham to cross the train line at this point, in a way it does not make sense for Bruce to cross it further South-East.

I propose that the existing Bruce / Isaacs / Hotham boundary be restored so that Hotham can continue to include the large Indo-Chinese communities of these suburbs, that Isaacs can continue to include the cohesive Greater Dandenong Community South of the Pakenham Line, and that Bruce can continue to include the communities of Mulgrave and Wheelers Hill, while accepting new electors from the current electorate of Holt. This would create stronger communities of interest in each electorate, use stronger, better known boundaries and greatly reduce the number of electors moved between each electorate.

1994 redistribution process and Liberal Party's 1994 submission

In support of the arguments I have made above in relation to the Pakenham Railway line, Mulgrave and Wheelers Hill and Springvale / Springvale South it is instructive to note that this exact same issue has been previously considered during the 1994 redistribution. Back then there was an eerily similar debate when the Commission proposed pulling Bruce down to south of the Railway line into Keysborough.

The Liberal Party's argument to the Commission was that the southern boundary should be the Railway Line; that Springvale didn't relate to the then City of Waverley; and that Mulgrave / Wheelers Hill related to Dandenong North and Endeavour Hills. I quote from the Liberal Party's 1994 submission:

“...enable Hotham to claim back some of the Springvale territory south of the railway line that the Committee transferred to Bruce. This territory is totally divorced from any community of interest within Bruce”.

“The proposed continuation of Bruce into the Springvale area below the railway line has no foundation on community of interest grounds and does not in any way serve the interests of the residents of these areas”.

“The residential development which earlier took place in Wheelers Hill and Mulgrave, which remain in the seat of Bruce, is currently being duplicated in Rosewood Downs and Endeavour Hills. The electors in this area have close relationships with the electors of Bruce. Their shopping patterns are toward Waverley Gardens, Brandon Park and Chadstone Shopping Centres via the South Eastern Arterial Road”.

In 1994 the Commission accepted these arguments, and in its report concluded (at Page 70) that:

“7. Numerous objections against the proposed boundaries in these areas were received. They were based essentially on a range of community interest issues...” “Key aspects of the objections were the inclusion of disparate portions of communities within Bruce and the splitting of communities...”

“8. The Commission considers that there is merit in revising the proposed boundaries in these areas to minimise the extent to which the electoral boundaries split the communities concerned.”

“10. The Commission proposes to address these objections by moving all of Keysborough and areas of Noble Park and Springvale South into one electorate.”

COMMENT ON LIBERAL PARTY’S 2018 OBJECTION

I am strongly of the view that it is not appropriate that the boundaries of the Divisions of Bruce, Holt and Isaacs be treated as a mere afterthought.

This is transparently the case, however, in the Liberal Party’s submission as the substantive argument relates to the Divisions of Dunkley and Flinders, with the consequential changes to other Divisions simply passed off as necessary ***“in order to meet the required number of electors.”***

The Divisions of Bruce, Hotham and Isaacs warrant serious consideration in their own right and should not be treated as an accidental by-product of changes to the Division of Dunkley.

SUMMARY

The strategic logic of the Commission to re-orient the Division of Bruce in a more East – West direction is sound however the execution is flawed from a local perspective and the Commission’s intent can be achieved much more simply and elegantly.

The alternative proposal set out in the Labor submission better accords with the statutory criteria by strengthening community of interests, respecting (existing) strong natural boundaries, significantly reducing change for electors across three electorates.

It also has the added benefit of taking account of adjustments that could be reasonably expected in the next redistribution by avoiding changes that are likely to be reversed next time. Please see the ALP's objection for further details in support of this proposal.

I would like the opportunity to have my submission considered formally at the public hearings and respectfully request that time be allotted to do so.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Julian Hill MP.

Julian Hill MP
Federal Member for Bruce